Prothalamion

Or

A Spousal Verse made by

Edm. Spenser.

IN HONOVR OF THE
DOV-
ble mariage of the two Honorabe & vertuous
Ladies, the Ladie Elizabeth and the Ladie Katherine Somerset, Daughters to the Right Honourable the Earle of Worcester and espoused to the two worthie Gentlemen M. Henry Gilford, and M. William Peter Esquyers.
Alme was the day, and through the trembling ayre,
Sweete breathing Zephyrus did softly play
A gentle spirit, that lightly did delay
Hot Titans beames, which then did glyster fayre:
When I whom sullein care,
Through discontent of my long fruitlesse stay
In Princes Court, and expectation vayne
Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away,
Like empty shaddowes, did aflict my brayne,
Walkt forth to ease my payne
Along the shoare of siluer streaming Themmes,
Whose rutty Bancke, the which his Riuer hemmes,
Was paynted all with variable flowers,
And all the meades adornd with daintie gemmes,
Fit to decke maydens bowres,
And crowne their Paramours,
Against the Brydale day, which is not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my Song.

There, in a Meadow, by the Riuers side,
A Flocke of Nymphes I chaunced to espy,
All louely Daughters of the Flood thereby,
With goodly greenish locks all loose vntyde,
As each had bene a Bryde,
And each one had a little wicker basket,
Made of fine twigs entrayled curiously,
In which they gathered flowers to fill their flasket:
And with fine Fingers, cropt full featously
The tender stalkes on hye.
Of euery sort, which in that Meadow grew,
They gathered some; the Violet pallid blew,
The little Dazie, that at euening closes,
The virgin Lillie, and the Primrose trew,
With store of vermeil Roses,
To decke their Bridegromes posies,
Against the Brydale day, which was not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my Song.

With that I saw two Swannes of goodly hewe,
Come softly swimming downe along the Lee;
Two fairer Birds I yet did neuer see:
The snow which doth the top of Pindus strew,
Did neuer whiter shew,
Nor Jove himselfe when he a Swan would be
For loue of Leda, whiter did appeare:
Yet Leda was they say as white as he,
Yet not so white as these, nor nothing neare;
So purely white they were,
That euen the gentle streame, the which them bare,
Seem'd foule to them, and bad his billowes spare
To wet their silken feathers, least they might
Soyle their fair plumes with water not so fayre,
And mar their beauties bright,
That shone as heauens light,
Against their Brydale day, which was not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my Song.

Eftsoones the Nymphes, which now had Flowers their fill,
Ran all in haste, to see that siluer brood,
As they came floating on the Christal Flood:
Whom when they sawe, they stood amazed still,
Their wondring eyes to fill:
Them seem'd they neuer saw a sight so fayre,
Of Fowles so louely, that they sure did deeme
Them heauenly borne, or to be that same payre
Which through the Skie draw Venus siluer Teeme:
For sure they did not seeme
To be begot of any earthly Seede,
But rather Angels or of Angels breede:
Yet were they bred of Somers-heat they say,
In sweetest Season, when each Flower and weede
The earth did fresh aray:
So fresh they seem'd as day,
Euen as their Brydale day, which was not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly till I end my Song.

5

Then forth they all out of their baskets drew,
Great store of Flowers, the honour of the field,
That to the sense did fragrant odours yeild,
All which vpon those goodly Birds they threw,
And all the Waues did strew,
That like old Peneus Waters they did seeme,
When downe along by pleasant Tempes shore
Scattred with Flowres, through Thessaly they streeme,
That they appeare through Lillies plenteous store,
Like a Brydes Chamber flore:
Two of those Nymphes, meane while, two Garlands bound,
Of freshest Flowres which in that Mead they found,
The which presenting all in trim Array,
Their snowie Foreheads therewithall they crownd,
Whil'st one did sing this Lay,
Prepar'd against that Day,
Against their Brydale day, which was not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly till I end my Song.

6

Ye gentle Birdes, the worlds faire ornament,
And heauens glories, whom this happie hower
Doth leade vnto your louers blisfull bower,
Joy may you haue and gentle hearts content
Of your loues couplement:
And let faire Venus, that is Queene of loue,
With her heart-quelling Sonne vpon you smile,
Whose smile they say, hath vertue to remoue
All Loues dislike, and friendships faultie guile
For euer to assoile.

Let endless Peace your steadfast hearts accord,
And blessed Plentie wait vpon you[r] bord,
And let your bed with pleasures chast abound,
That fruitfull issue may to you afford:
Which may your foes confound,
And make your ioyes redound,
Vpon your Brydale day, which is not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softlie, till I end my Song.

So ended she; and all the rest around
To her redoubled that her undersong,
Which said, their bridale daye should not be long.
And gentle Eccho from the neighbour ground,
Their accents did resound?
So forth, those ioyous Birdes did passe along,
Adowne the Lee, that to them murmurde low,
As he would speake, but that he lackt a tong
Yeat did by signes his glad affection show,
Making his streame run slow.
And all the foule which in his flood did dwell
Gan flocke about these twaine, that did excell
The rest, so far, as Cynthia doth shend
The lesser starres. So they enranged well,
Did on those two attend,
And their best seruice lend,
Against their wedding day, which was not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my song.

At length they all to mery London came,
To mery London, my most kindly Nurse,
That to me gaue, this Lifes first natuie sourse:
Though from another place I take my name,
An house of auncient fame.
There when they came, whereas those bricky towres,
The which on Themmes brode aged backe doe ryde,
Where now the studious Lawyers haue their bowers
That whylome wont the Templer Knights to byde,
Till they decayd through pride:
Next whereunto there standes a stately place,
Where oft I gayned giftes and goodly grace
Of that great Lord, which therein wont to dwell,
Whose want too well, now feeles my friendless case:
But Ah here fits not well
Olde woes, but ioyes to tell
Against the bridale daye, which is not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly till I end my Song.

Yet therein now doth lodge a noble Peer,
Great Englands glory and the Worlds wide wonder,
Whose dreadfull name, late through all Spaine did thunder.
And Hercules two pillors standing neere,
Did make to quake and feare:
Faire branch of Honor, flower of Cheualrie,
That fillest England with thy triumphes fame,
Ioy haue thou of thy noble victorie,
And endlesse happinesse of thine owne name
That promiseth the same:
That through thy prowesse and victorious armes,
Thy country may be freed from forraine harmes:
And great Elisaes glorious name may ring
Through al the world, fil'd with thy wide Alarmes,
Which some braue muse may sing
To ages following,
Vpon the Brydale day, which is not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly till I end my Song.

From those high Towers, this noble Lord issuing,
Like radiant Hesper when his golden hayre
in th'Ocean billowes he hath Bathed fayre,
Descended to the Riuers open vewing,
With a great traine ensuing.
Aboue the rest were goodly to bee seene
Two gentle Knights of louely face and feature,
Beseeing well the bower of anie Queene,
With gifts of wit and ornaments of nature,
Fit for so goodly stature:
That like the twins of love they seem'd in sight,
Which decke the Bauldricke of the Heauens bright:
They two forth pacing to the Riuers side,
Receiued those two faire Brides, their Loues delight,
Which at th'appointed tyde,
Each one did make his Bryde,
Against their Brydale day, which is not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my Song.

FINIS.
Notes

Prothalamion
-- "before a marriage.". This poem was written on the occasion of (and probably read or performed at) the double wedding of the daughters of the Earl of Worcester, circa 1595.
Notes

Zephyrus
-- wind; in particular the West Wind.
Titans
--proto-gods of Greek mythology; in this case Helios, son of Hyperion: god of the sun.
Notes

rutty
--here "rut" = "root"; hence "root-covered."
variable
--the multicolored flowers.
Notes

Flood
--the river Thames.
Notes

vntyed
--"the custom was for brides to wear their hair loose at weddings." --Richard Sylvester, The Anchor Anthology of Sixteenth Century Verse.
Notes

entrayled --braided.
Notes

flasket
--a basket, wider than a fruit basket, very shallow, for gathering flowers.
Notes

feateously
--nimbly.
vermeil
--crimson.
Notes

Pindus
--mountain home of the Muses in Greece.
Notes

Leda
--visited by Jupiter, who appeared to her as a swan.
Notes

Somers-heat
--Elizabeth and Katherine Somerset.
Notes

Peneus
--river near mount Pindus, seat of the Muses.
Notes

**couplement**
-- joining together (in marriage).
Sonne
--Cupid.
dislike
--a disdain for romantic love, or the humanistic ideal of love, or all three together: see *Loves Labours Lost*.
assoile
--remove.
>vndersong
--a short chorus, usually consist of but a line or half line of verse, rhyming with the lines sung by the lead.
Notes

Cynthia
--the Moon; also, Queen Elizabeth, who outshines all her court.
Notes

bricky towres
--visible from that spot was one of the Inns of Court, the Temple, dating back to the Knights Templar.
Notes

all Spaine
--a reference to the raiding exploits of Essex.
Notes

pillors
--rocky prominences at the straits of Gibraltar: the "Pillars of Hercules."
Notes

twins of Jove
the Gemini, Castor and Pollux.--
Bauldricke
--a belt for carrying a scabbard and other articles of war, often studded with semiprecious stones; here, the zodiac.